



*Where the subject may be perishable
but the insight isn't.*

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Seeking One Good Sprout Grower And One Good Retailer — Primus Steps Up

Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, June 2, 2009

We have been [extensively covering](#) the alfalfa sprout/salmonella situation.

Anyone who has looked at the interplay of sprouts and food safety has to have a healthy respect for the difficulties in this area. Long before there was a recognized problem with leafy greens, tomatoes or melons, there was a known problem with sprouts.

So the FDA came out with its [guidance document](#) back in 1999.

The gist of the problem is that the seeds can be contaminated with a pathogen and the growing environment for sprouts is often conducive to allowing that pathogen to multiply.

The primary solution has been an FDA-recognized washing and testing regimen at the sprouter level.

In addition, as we mentioned [here](#), some seed companies, such as International Specialty Supply, have adopted their own testing regimens.

The testing programs on seed may help, but as we discussed [here](#), testing has to be done at great frequency to be statistically valid.

The current thinking on food safety is that the best approach is prevention. So although the sprouters following FDA rules is crucial, it would be even better if the pathogen never entered their facilities. Although the ISS system of testing may be useful, if we can reduce the contamination level entering the seed company facility, that would be better still.

The problem here, as we identified [earlier](#), is that alfalfa is grown as animal feed. This means that, in most cases, little, if any, effort is exerted to exclude pathogens from wild life, grazing animals, etc. No water tests, no soil amendment tests, etc.

In other words, the alfalfa is grown not as food, fit for human consumption, but as animal feed.

Here at the Pundit, we build on the almost quarter century heritage of Pundit sister publication, [PRODUCE BUSINESS](#), whose motto has long been “initiating industry improvement.” Well, we thought this was an area where we could do some good.

One call to Bob Stovicek, President of Primus Group, brought his enthusiastic participation, and on a *pro bono publica* basis — that means free if your Latin is rusty — Primus has agreed to lend its consulting, inspection and auditing services to one grower who will agree to participate with us in an experiment to grow alfalfa sprouts intended for human consumption.

In other words, Primus will come in and do a risk assessment with the grower and a plan will be developed to grow the alfalfa seed in accordance with all GAPs and all procedures that would be appropriate for a food that will be eaten raw.

We’ve made arrangements with ISS to process the seed.

Here is what we are seeking now: :

We need one grower to volunteer to grow the alfalfa seed as food for human consumption. You will work with Primus with the goal of producing high quality seed that is less likely to harbor pathogens than seed grown for animals. You will be a pioneer helping the industry move toward a higher standard of food safety. You will learn a lot and we will report on your efforts here at the Pundit. If you are a grower interested in participating in this project, please e-mail us [here](#).

We need a retailer to commit to the experiment as well. We will work with your preferred sprouter who follows FDA food safety practices and supply him the seed. It is likely that the costs of growing under all GAPS will be higher than growing seed for animals, so we need a retailer so committed to food safety that it is willing to agree to pay a little extra on its alfalfa sprouts to have them sprouted from seed raised for human consumption. The retailer who steps up will be showing its commitment to developing the highest possible food safety standards. Your participation will also be recognized through coverage on the Pundit. If you are a retailer interested in participating please, e-mail us [here](#).

Many thanks to Primus and ISS for their participation. Very often, food safety is a mystery. Here is a clear step we can take to make things better than they are. Surely there is both a grower and a retailer out there who are prepared to step up and make a little history while helping the industry and consumers. We are looking forward to making your acquaintance.
